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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 001292

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/06/2029
TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL KDEM VE
SUBJECT: STUDENT HUNGER STRIKES ENDED, BUT APPEALS FOR OAS
VISIT CONTINUE

REF: A. CARACAS 1269
1B. CARACAS 1279

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBIN D. MEYER
REASON 1.4 (D)

11. (SBU) Summary: Student protests calling for a visit by the Commission on Human Rights (CIDH) of the Organization of American States (OAS) continue. However, an October 3 march was poorly attended and ended with students "mooning" National Guard troops. On October 5, 15 students in the border state of Tachira ended their hunger strike following a court decision to retry the case of imprisoned journalist Gustavo Azocar. On October 5, three students symbolically chained themselves inside the Brazilian Embassy demanding that Brazil serve as a mediator between the Venezuelan government and the OAS to guarantee a visit by the CIDH; they left after the Brazilian Ambassador agreed to transmit their demands to President Lula. Student leaders have not yet assembled a delegation for their planned visit to the OAS in Washington (ref b). End Summary.

Student Protests Continue on the Street

12. (SBU) Student leaders convoked a march in Caracas on October 3 calling for a visit by the CIDH and protesting the continued detention of political prisoners. The march was poorly attended, and media coverage was limited and primarily focused on the decision by a group of students to drop their pants and "moon" the National Guard troops. During his weekly "Alo Presidente" broadcast on October 4, President Chavez ridiculed the students for bringing shame to their cause. Chavez claimed the students were risking their lives in hunger strikes for so-called political prisoners who were nothing more than corrupt individuals, thieves, or assassins.

13. (SBU) Student activist Julio Rivas, who was released from prison on September 28 (ref a), traveled to the border state of Tachira over the weekend to provide moral support to approximately 15 students who had been on a hunger strike since September 30 in support of imprisoned journalist Gustavo Azocar. The students lifted their hunger strike on October 5 following a decision by the court to annul earlier proceedings and to retry Azocar, although the court refused to release Azocar pending trial. (Note: Gustavo Azocar is a professor and journalist, known for his criticisms of the government and of local Chavista officials. He has been detained since June 29 following the publication of excerpts of his trial on the internet. He was being prosecuted for

alleged illegal enrichment as a result of purported irregularities in his contract with an advertising company for the Tachira State lottery. The judge handling his first trial was suspended in September. End Note.)

... and at the Brazilian Embassy in Caracas

14. (SBU) On October 5, four students from Carabobo State showed up at the Brazilian Embassy without an appointment and requested a meeting with the Brazilian Ambassador. (Note: The Brazilian Embassy is located in an office building, with security guards both in the lobby and at the entry to the Embassy suite. End Note.) When told that the Ambassador was busy and would receive them later, the students symbolically chained themselves to the Embassy with cellophane tape, refusing to leave until the Brazilian government agreed to serve as a mediator between the Venezuelan government and the OAS to guarantee a visit by the CIDH. The Brazilian Embassy evacuated its personnel from the building and reportedly threatened to have the National Guard remove the students. Reports circulated that more students were enroute to the Embassy. After about seven hours, the Ambassador agreed to transmit the students' demands to President Lula and to withdraw the National Guard so that the students could depart peacefully. However, on October 6, the media reported that the Brazilian Foreign Ministry denied making any commitments to the students.

15. (C) Chilean Polcouns Cabrera told Polcouns that Embassy personnel had been evacuated on October 5 for fear that the Chilean Embassy might be the next destination for the student protesters because of the role of OAS Director General Insulza, a Chilean, in negotiating the end of the hunger strike. Cabrera said the students' decision to target the Brazilian Embassy in Caracas was related to Brazil's cooperation with President Chavez in supporting President Zelaya's return to Honduras.

... but Not Yet at the OAS in Washington

16. (C) The students have not yet reached agreement on a delegation to represent them at the OAS in Washington. (Note: Per ref b, on September 30, as part of his effort to end the student hunger strike, OAS Secretary General Insulza told students that they could go and present their demands to the OAS in Washington.) Sources within the student movement have told the Embassy of infighting among groups of students, some of whom reportedly have been offered positions in opposition political parties.

Comment

17. (C) The low turnout at the October 3 march, the decision to "moon" the National Guard, the attempted occupation of the Brazilian Embassy, and the inability to form and send a student delegation to the OAS in Washington all suggest the fragility and immaturity of this nascent student movement. Post remains ready and willing to assist the students in any future trip to Washington.

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